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Introduction

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(Botanic Gardens, Singapore, 1954-1969)

Corner's septuagenary fell on 12 January, 1976. It was the intention of a number of his research students and friends to develop an idea mooted by David Frodin into a little book to mark the occasion. However,

'The best-laid schemes o' mice an' men
Gang aft a-gley,
And lea'e us nought but grief an' pain
For promised joy.'

(Robert Burns: *To a mouse*, 1785.)

Very considerable difficulties have arisen over the preparation and publication, so that only now, by the courtesy of the Editor of the Gardens' Bulletin, Singapore, does it appear — in retrospect, but, nevertheless, in a token of our esteem.

It was but inevitable that with such innate stimulating enthusiasm for botany, Corner should find the opportunity during his service in Singapore to give free rein to it. The 'Durian Theory' of evolution is here discussed, as along with the tropical rain-forest which Corner demonstrated in his later years as Professor of Tropical Botany at Cambridge ought to form the central pillar of any basis for teaching botany. Universities in tropical regions in centres of floral evolution with the plant materials on their door-step should be mindful of establishing leading research schools instead of letting the world rely on botanists tutored on temperate botany. Long before announcing his Durian Theory but with perhaps the seeds of the idea quietly growing in his mind, Corner began teaching, amongst his other duties in the Botanic Gardens, students in the Raffles College and in the King Edward VII College of Medicine in Singapore. These are now integral parts of the University of Singapore, and many of the older collegiates recall his lectures with interest and pleasure.

In 1937 while on expedition in N.E. Malaya he brought a young *berok* monkey (*Macaca nemestrina*). This is the species that is trained to pick ripe coconuts, and Corner saw the possibility of training one to pick plant specimens from high forest trees at a height of perhaps 50-60 m from the ground. The *berok* had its début on a trip to Fraser's Hill and proved to be so successful that two more were acquired, and later a fourth. Words of a command had to be taught to guide the monkey to what was wanted visible to the operator lying on the ground scanning the tree-canopy through binoculars. Infinite patience was necessary, and both he and his assistant, Ngadiman bin Haji Ismail, often suffered painful monkey-bites. Closer to Singapore, the Mawai-Sungei Sedili swamp-forest, accessible on single-day forays, was an area of much interest to Corner, and the monkeys were often used there. To 'those-in-the-know', this area is called Corner's Corner, and it was here that he contracted a disease akin to black-water fever that very nearly killed him, an end frustrated by skilled and devoted nursing in the Singapore General Hospital. At that time the only access to Kuala Sedili was by river from Mawai. Now the time-conscious and hurry-mad swoosh down to the river-mouth by highway and agricultural settlement has pushed back very large tracts of the drier forest, and has chased out the elephants, tigers and wild-life that I have been fortunate enough to see there. But the actual swamp-forest, by virtue of its wetness, still has a life-expectancy (who knows?) for many years till

'development' demands further rapine. So it is good to learn that Corner has written an account of the Southern Malayan swamp forests that he knows so well and that his account is soon to appear as a supplement to the *Gardens' Bulletin, Singapore*.

Under a growing consciousness for conservation of biological resources, nature reserves were created in Singapore in 1937 and were put under the Gardens control. Ngadiman was Head Ranger and the team of monkeys were daily exercised there when they were not out on expedition. Thus Corner had constant interest in the reserves, especially the Bukit Timah Reserve where the use of the monkeys added to our knowledge of the tree flora. The mangrove reserve at Pandan was patrolled by an honorary warden, the late Towkay Chua Ho Ann, who was allowed to take a limited amount of timber for charcoal burning as *quid pro quo* for replanting and his wardenship. During the Japanese occupation Chua had a big charcoal contract with the Japanese Navy and consequently was 'in the money.' Both Holtum and Corner were retained by the Japanese in an advisory capacity in the Gardens, and Chua was able to pass not inconsiderable sums of money over to Corner which he used for the benefit of Gardens staff on the black market. During the latter part of this time, he and Holtum lived in a single room in the Botanic Gardens Director's house which was my study while I lived there. Corner, it seems, liked to 'live dangerously.' Contact with outside persons was not allowed and the receipt of money, had it been discovered, would have had the most serious consequences. Furthermore, Japanese Military Officers lived upstairs and their radio had its attractions and risks.

When Singapore surrendered to General Yamashita in 1942, the arrival of Professor Hidezo Tanakadate rescued the Botanic Gardens from military occupation. Sir Shenton Thomas, as former Governor of the Straits Settlements, had written a letter requesting the Japanese authorities to respect libraries, scientific collections, and places of historic interest. This letter Corner gave to Tanakadate who, with his own high influence and a long friendship with the General from student days, combined the Botanic Gardens and Raffles Museum into a unit of conservation. Presidency of this unit was accepted by Marquis Tokugawa, Supreme Consulting Adviser to the Nippon Military Administration, and this organisation received the personal approval of Count Terauchi, Supreme Commander of S.E. Asia. On the return of Tanakadate to Tokyo, Professor Kwan Koriba took charge of the Botanic Gardens. He was assisted by K. Watanabe who, in Singapore and Penang, assembled a remarkable collection of drawings of economic plants. In 1945 the drawings were deposited for safety in the Singapore herbarium. In 1960 Watanabe asked if they might be returned to him for publication, but they could not be found. Then blew an ill wind. In 1963 the old herbarium was in danger of collapse; its contents were hurriedly removed, and the drawings came to light. There followed an encyclopaedic work of reference prepared jointly by Corner and Watanabe: *Illustrated Guide to Tropical Plants* (1969).

Of the early days, Dr. Furtado, of the Gardens Staff, recalls a matter of interest and importance that is worth recording. Corner foresaw looting and persuaded the authorities to have officially signed notices of prohibited entry to the Raffles Library, the Raffles College and the building of the offices of the law firm Donaldson and Burkinshaw in which lay the largest private collection of lawbooks. Corner personally drove Tanakadate in the Gardens lorry to fix up these decrees. Equipment and the books of these buildings were thus saved from looting and damage. Count Terauchi also directed the valuable books from the Government House Library to be stored in the Tanglin Barracks. Corner was also able to salvage parts of the library of the Colonial Secretariat in Empress Place which had been thrown out of the building. At the end of the war when the Allied Forces entered Singapore Corner was again instrumental in obtaining similar protection from the British Military Administration, and though the Garden became a tented campsite no unauthorised entry was made into the buildings.

During these difficult years both Corner and Holtum, free from administrative duties, were able to devote much time to research. Corner worked on the larger fungi; and the development of flowers and fruits of various families of trees. The monograph on *Clavaria*, as indeed also, the *Durian* Theory began to take shape at this time, and in the post war years we have seen with admiration a succession of major works that must have had their origins in adversity. But this period had made a mark: he was invalidated out of service in 1947, though happily he was soon to regain good health, and we have been delighted to see him return again and again to Singapore, and as leader of the Royal Society's expeditions of 1961 and 1964 to Kinabalu in Sabah and of 1965 to the Solomon Islands.

This note started as a brief introduction to the articles that follow. Write something about Corner's Singapore days, said the Editors of this Festschrift. There is much, but let this suffice.

Salam masera! Lanjutkan usia!

(All hail! Long Life!)

Thus we hope it will be with him and with his charming wife, Helga.